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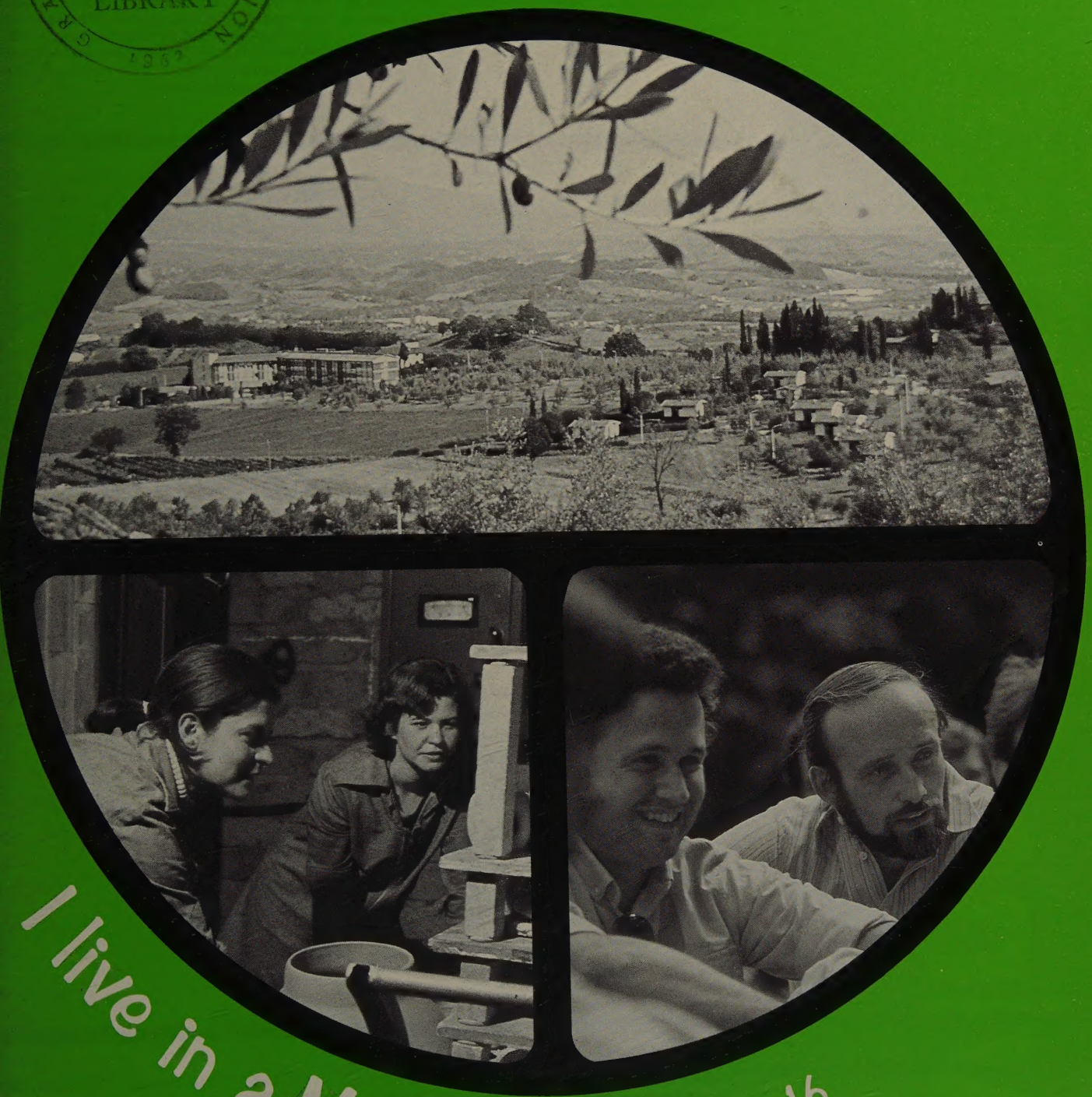

I live in a Mariapolis

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Cover: Scenes of life in the perman Mariapolis of Loppiano in Italy.

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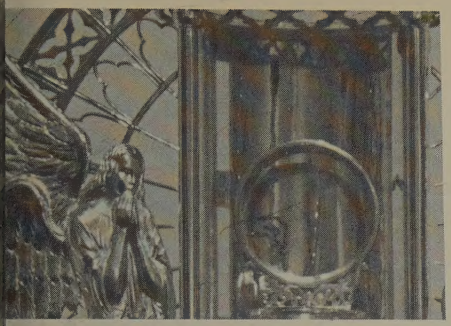
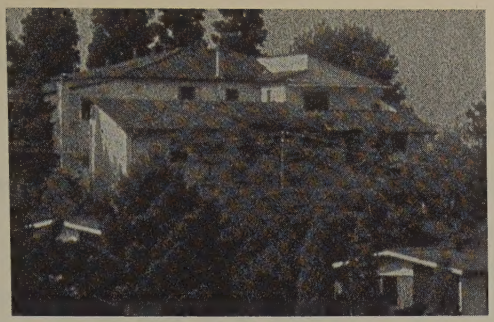


CHANNELS OF A LIFE THAT DOESN'T PASS: Four artists interviewed shared their impressions of working in a field that perhaps more than any other expresses that something within each of us which is immortal.



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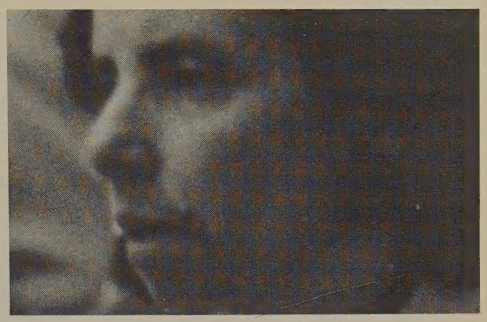

23 *IN THE LIGHT OF THE PRESENT MOMENT: Rosa's diary annotations reflect in an always-stronger way her desire to make of her life a thrust toward sanctity.*

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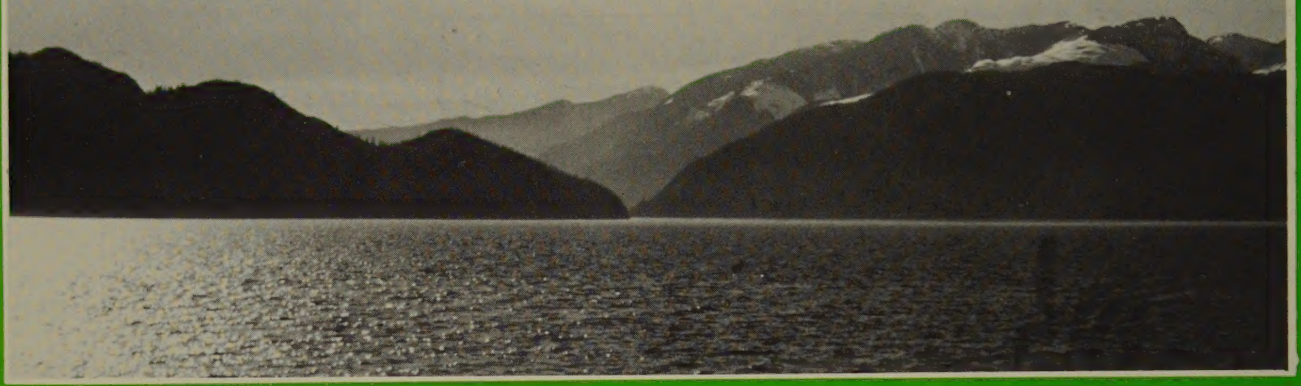
And our union with God?

by CHIARA LUBICH



A spirituality which defines itself with the word unity, should bring people not only to unity with their neighbor but also to union with God. What can you tell us about the union of our souls with God and of prayer life in the Movement?

This question would merit a well-meditated, in-depth and lengthy answer. It is rather difficult in just a few lines to cover such an important subject without the risk of being superficial and simplistic. I will try, however, to say something about it.

As far as vocal prayer is concerned, the members of the Movement pray in different ways according to their vocation. This is defined in the Statutes or guidelines of the different branches or movements which are all offshoots of the Focolare Movement.

In terms of mental prayer, that is, spontaneous prayer as an expression of our love for God, we could make the following observations.

When people understand the spirituality of unity and try to live it generously, putting God in the first place in their lives, they experience that, after having tried to love their neighbors throughout the day, out of love for God, forgetting themselves completely in order to make themselves "one" with their neighbor, to "live the other" so to speak, they discover within themselves, when it is the moment for prayer, a union with God that they never had before. To experience in their soul, then, this love for God is a great help for all the members of the Movement who, for the most part, live in the midst of the world. They become more and more aware that besides the many external factors that attract us and press in on us from outside, there exits an inner world, a beautiful and much more attractive world that they discover perhaps for the first time. This is already the beginning of union with God that leads the soul into a new type of prayer.

Then, if the person does not put obstacles in the way, this kind of prayer continues especially throughout the first months of this new life in which, as a general experience, temptations, such as

those against purity, disappear, often completely. This is certainly a special grace that God gives to these persons who are starting out on their way to him, to attract them to him, to his Kingdom.

We have noticed that if, in this period, moments of aridity in prayer occur it is usually because the person, in his or her spiritual life, is not totally attentive to the will of God in the present moment, not totally committed. These periods may also be the result of individual attachment to the consolations of prayer, or they may occur as the result of poor health and so on.

After the first months have passed, the temptations which the members of the Movement experienced before can return and disturb them during the time of prayer and recollection.

It is the moment in which they see very clearly that they must seriously embrace the cross, recognizing in these sufferings the countenance of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken.

If, however, when trials of this kind come upon them, they struggle against them and win, then these trials can be a preparation for an even deeper union with God.

Union with God, we know, is something sublime, it is love and it is light. Jesus said, in fact, that he manifests himself to the one who loves him.

Those who live our spirituality, which is all centered on love, soon realize what this light, this supernatural light, is. They realize that their life, besides being action, is also contemplation.

Active life is, in a certain way, enlightened and guided by the contemplative aspect.

Light, contemplation, however, in the members of the Movement who try to constantly maintain unity with their neighbors, is not only the fruit of the presence of Jesus in each person individually. It is also the fruit of that particular presence of Jesus that can be found where two or three are united in his name.

These persons, in traveling along this spiritual way, also encounter the classic so-called passive purifications of "the senses"; they are the sufferings brought on by the loss of a relative or because of an illness, and so on. Others, more mature in their spiritual life can, in certain moments, experience something known as "the dark night of the spirit" during which the person is purified with sufferings that are so strong that they can only be compared to purgatory.

We could affirm at this point, however, that if these people remain well inserted in the community where Jesus is present, the nights both of the senses and of the spirit are somewhat alleviated. We can also say that special graces, which are never lacking, become normal, also because they are communicated with prudence and simplicity to the others for the edification of all.

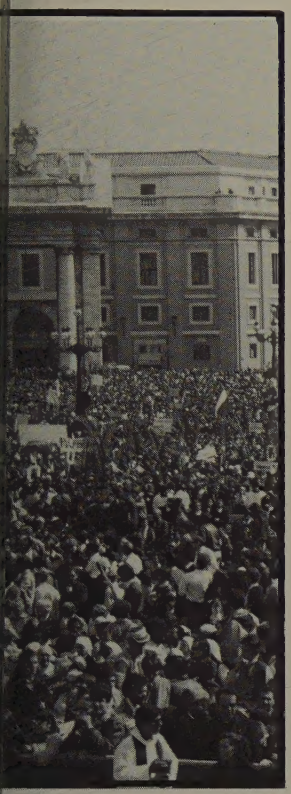
However, through the practice of living the word of life which makes us always more similar to Christ and which we try to live with intensity sharing our experiences in living it; through the constant effort to put the new commandment of Jesus into practice, having as the measure of our love for one another that of Jesus crucified and forsaken; for the presence of Christ in the midst of the community that comes as a consequence of living this commandment; for the communion with Christ in the Eucharist; the Holy Spirit can, and in reality *does* lead the members of the Movement who are faithful to their vocation to that unity with Christ through which at least in certain moments the individual is able to sincerely repeat with Saint Paul, "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me."[1] This is nothing other than the objective of every spirituality in the Church.

1) Gal. 2:20

From all over the world in the name of peace

On March 30 in Saint John Lateran Square and on March 31, Palm Sunday, in Saint Peter's, Pope John Paul II met with 200,000 youth who had gathered for a celebration on the theme "Christ our peace."

As part of the activities planned for these memorable days, the youth of the Focolare Movement gathered together on March 29 and on the morning of the 30th to participate in the Genfest '85 entitled "Many roads towards a united world." **Living City** will dedicate its next issue to coverage of these exceptional events. The photos on the following pages give us a taste of those days.



GENFEST 1985

Moments of an unforgett

Channels of a life that doesn't pass

BY MARY CASS

One of the wonderful things about art is that one doesn't have to be a connoisseur to enjoy it. It is so varied in its expressions that, as a field, it has a universal appeal. We can all find some form of it to take pleasure in. What often leads us to say, "That's a beautiful work" is that in viewing it something of what has been expressed through the piece has impressed us from within—an impression which is lasting, deep and difficult to put into words. We can see it again and again and feel that there is nothing repetitious in the experience. Each time it seems to inspire us in new and uplifting ways. Reflecting on why this is so gave me the impetus to seek out to interview a few artists in the various fields of art whose works have, in some way, both a universal and lasting quality.

Louis Feron lives in a small country village nestled in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. His modest, but originally-styled home—a remodelled barn—reflects something of his person: humble, with a genius to discover and portray in art the beauty hidden within simple people and things.

I am always very punctual for my visits with Louis, an old friend of mine; to arrive too early on a warm summer day would mean finding him off fishing with a friend or deeply engrossed in his work at the oak table. It would be better not to disturb him in these precious moments.

By his very greeting, Louis makes one feel unique, with "something special" that could even make you a worthy subject for one of his future works. Although we have been good friends for more than ten years, I realized that I knew very little about his background. I was very grateful to Leslie his wife for sharing something of this with me.

Louis Feron, chaser, goldsmith and sculptor was born into a family of artisans in Rouen, France in 1901 near the town's cathedral. When he was nine years old he began to study art in Paris, and at fifteen he started his apprenticeship in three studios specializing in works in bronze. There he learned the complex techniques of ornamental chasing before going on to gold and silversmithing at the *Atelier Delsinne* in Paris. In 1932 he won the title of "First Chaser-Goldsmith of France" and was decorated commander of the *Ordre du Travail* at the Sorbonne. The depression following World War I closed the workshops in France and resulted in Feron's decision to leave for Costa Rica. During his eleven years there he worked on commissions from the Church, government and private buyers, conceiving and executing sculptures, objects of different kinds and jewelry from his own work-

"Art is knowing how to instill in a painting, a sculpture, a musical piece, an architectural work, that something in the soul that doesn't die."

CHIARA LUBICH

shop. Feron came to the United States in 1945 and opened up a workshop in New York City. He kept that shop for thirty-eight years. Working as always by hand, he designed and completed many objects and sculptures for churches throughout the continent and abroad, and for stores such as Van Cleef & Arpels, Cartier, Bronzini, Tiffany & Co. and Steuben Glass.

A resident of New Hampshire since 1967, Louis is far from retired. He continues to create when inspiration moves him, building a legacy of beauty for the world to enjoy. Louis himself says: "Art for me is an expression of the spirit. It is deeply mysterious in its source and cannot be defined or manipulated. I practice my trade with great pleasure and enthusiasm, keeping myself in readiness. Sometimes it visits me." It seems to me that these words define the source of his creativity.

Visiting his home you see samples of Louis' works carefully placed throughout the rooms: a beautiful head of the crucified Lord, a bust of a happy child, the Virgin Mary holding her dying son.

One of the best moments is always the tour of the barn floor and loft (now Louis' home and work studio). He shows me each piece with contagious enthusiasm and joy, and I never tire of seeing them. One is a familiar head—my eighty-three year old father. How perfectly Louis has captured in clay what I could hardly put into words: a character filled with the wisdom of experience and depth. What was his formula for capturing and expressing so perfectly the inner nature of his subjects. "I try to please myself, selfishly perhaps. Choosing between two lines, two volumes, I try to extract the moral character of my subject. With one it may be the purity of feelings of the man, or the truthfulness of the child. With another it may be the intensity and intellectual integrity that impresses me. It is a challenge and I try to win. My reward? The faces of the people when they receive my work."

Another special moment of my visits is when Leslie brings in the albums of photos of Louis' works in the area of religious art. Together we go through them. With deep awareness and appreciation of her husband's talent she takes me page by page, in and out of some of the finest churches in the world. There are pictures of monstrances, silver-gilted, hammered and chased in repousse, sanctuary lights, pectoral crosses, giant crucifixes in hammered silver, varying statues of sacred figures—all an ode to "God's Holy Dwelling."

"Each time I work at a 'sacred piece' I experience immense satisfaction. Working for people who believe and trust has never been a 'business' for me. I have had many wonderful experiences working for the Church. All my life I have thought of myself as a sacred link carrying on, intact, a complex goldsmith trade that goes back thousands of years celebrating spiritual qualities."

The last words of his interview seemed to me to explain why his works contain a sense of immortality: "You know I am never sure if I have really done something great or beautiful. Art works through me. I am a crucible. For me, and perhaps it is pretentious to say so, but I try to transcend my life with my art." ►

Works executed by Louis Feron: Opposite page, detail of a monstrance; above, a plate, teapot and creamer; right, a sanctuary lamp.

Let's briefly consider another form of art which is popularly viewed by all—television plays. **Jerome Coopersmith** seems to be one of certainly many screen writers who has not compromised his talent for monetary gain.

Resisting the pressure of commercialism and "popular demand," he has maintained a quality in his work that causes it to merit the title "art."

He is the author of more than 100 television plays. He has written dramas, documentaries, TV movies and children's programs for all the major networks. For eight years he was a regular contributor to the CBS golden age classic, Armstrong Circle Theater.

As Associate Professor in the Theater and Film Department of Hunter College, New York, Mr. Coopersmith impresses his students with the integrity and sincerity with which he views his work. One of his favorite quotes from an ancient Greek definition, "Art is truth encased in beauty" has remained as a guideline for his work.

"This is one of my favorite definitions of art," Mr. Coopersmith shared with us, "because in accepting it I feel compelled to try and attain two things. One is truth and the other is beauty. By truth I mean writing with integrity, writing material that conforms with human behavior as it really exists in the world. By beauty I mean writing with a sense of design.

"It seems to me as well that the measure of an artist is whether he or she has the ability to take the everyday event and turn it into something universal, something that everyone can associate with. The great artists have been able to do that; that is why their works are lasting. I'm not trying to make any pretentions or claims in that department but I try to do the best I can. For example right now I'm writing a T.V. movie. I have tried to choose a theme that both myself and many others can readily identify with—the middle-age crisis. I particularly focus in on what this means for men when they realize that they are growing old. They have to face the fact that they're going to die, perhaps without attaining what they had wanted to attain in life. This sends them into a crisis and they panic.

"I feel that if I can be successful in handling this theme artistically, in a way that can be recognized and identified with by those in this situation, then it can contribute to a greater understanding of this difficult moment in one's life. People will be helped not to panic about it. They will be able to face it with greater simplicity—knowing that this can happen in life's process and that one can live through it and recover.

"Therefore, I feel that the extent to which I am successful in this will be the extent to which I've been successful in creating a form of art."

We were interested in knowing what Mr. Coopersmith thought of a definition Chiara Lubich had given of art: "Art is knowing how to instill in a painting, a sculpture, a musical piece, an architectural work, that something in the soul that does not die." His answer was immediate: "I think that's an excellent definition. It conveys to me the same reality as my favorite Greek quote. Truth is something immortal, everlasting and, as we all know, it goes beyond the life of any human being. If truth then becomes the 'soul' of one's work, it can be hoped then that as art it will be everlasting." ►

George Malave

Abraham and Deborah Menashe with their daughter Rebecca.

Abraham Menashe, a renowned photographer, is noted for the superior sensitivity and depth of his work. He impressed us with one of his remarks: "All that I photograph has to do with God's presence in one form or another, without actually directly talking about it (something very difficult to do). I think the challenge is in showing the connection between the natural and supernatural in life and through that give greater reverence to the Almighty."

A vivacious five-year-old daughter, Rebecca, briefly interrupted her father's interview for her good-night kiss. As she went bounding off, Menashe turned his full attention to us. "When I left high school, I was very interested in working as a counselor, maybe even going into the Peace Corps. I wanted to do something 'down to earth' with people. I was also very interested in doing things with my hands. Whatever I did with my hands turned out very well and this kind of activity was very inspiring, so I was not sure which direction I was really meant to follow. New York University had good programs in both these areas so I decided to go there. I picked up the camera that first year and dropped everything after that because, although I didn't know it at the time, it was a perfect way to deal with people and be creative at the same time. It was a good way to focus on the concerns of the human spirit and be inspiring and creative.

"After five years of floundering around with a camera, I discovered what I wanted to say and that was my beginning. I literally carried my camera everywhere I went, taking random shots. I noticed that some pictures I discarded while others I kept. I wondered why those pictures I kept meant something to me, what did they say. I quickly realized that the ingredient in them had to do with grace; it was there in the particular way that light fell on someone's shoulder, in the way a mother held her child, those gestures that made us transcend our animal nature, moments when life's higher qualities touched people's lives. I was very curious to explore grace as a theme for the first time."

His exploration of this topic became the theme of his first published work: *Inner Grace*. We were curious to know what motivated his choice of such a theme. "As I worked at it I realized that there were two things happening within me. One was that the subjects I was focusing in on had their limitations (they were all handicapped individuals) but they were compensated for in this by a divine source, and that had a lot to do with their beauty. The other factor was that I began to hear my 'inner voice' more clearly directing me, as it were, to pursue this medium. It opened up several themes that I wanted to commit myself to and I realized that each one of them was connected to the other. I look at it as a short description of God's presence in our lives that takes on all kinds of forms.

"There is a type of photography that attempts to get people to change socially. This kind of photography isn't meant to do that. It's meant as an icon, or rather 'almost' as an icon. It's meant to share something that might evoke your entunement to the delicacy of life or to your own relationship to the inner Teacher. I have tried in *Inner Grace* to somehow embody this. To me the photographs form a prayer not only in the making of them.

but also in the sharing of them. I feel that I am only a channel for the greater source. That's where I gain my power. It's a strange way of working, but when I yield to give my breath, my energy, my gift, to be an expression of a greater gift, and I feel my work becomes a mission. I am compelled to serve because of the beauty of the one I am trying to serve. I keep thinking of the word breath, I mean the breath of the Almighty which is so life giving; when one acknowledges it, it naturally leads one to the most meaningful things."

Our silent reflection on Menashe's last words was broken by the entrance of his wife Deborah, carrying a tempting tray of tea and cake. Unable to resist this moment of distraction, Rebecca gaily skipped in and around us, singing her last good night at her mother's beckoning.

I shared with Menashe how struck I had been by his words in the introduction to his latest book, *The Face of Prayer:* "To the extent that we have the courage to seek moments of solitude and listen to our inner voice, we will be guided by a light that lives in us. We come to know a love that does not disappoint—peace the world does not offer."

He continued to comment on my impressions. "My work is an attempt to create a different version of *The Family of Man*[1] where you see all kinds of situations presented, but all ►

Photo by Abraham Menashe taken at the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery, Woodstock, New York. (From the book "The Face of Prayer", Knopf, New York.

"I had not thought of using the camera; I just wanted to share this woman's sorrow." (Photo by Abraham Menashe)

celebrating life. I think the purpose of this type of photography is to affirm, to glorify, to celebrate; to say 'yes' to our presence here. So it's a wondrous journey of being in love."

What brought Mr. Menashe the greatest joy in exercising his talent? "The greatest joy is actually in being allowed to create something and later see it take on another dimension when someone else is touched by it. Then it somehow not only completes itself but it comes back as an inspiration, renewed, as if someone else has made it for you. It's a gift to see people contemplating my pictures; almost entering into another dimension, that sacred space where God abides. This happens through the 'honesty' of the picture. I use the word of 'honesty' here because it's connected directly to a time when I was most honest, that is the time when the thing was going on. The fusion of this with the spirit of the moment, through the camera, allow this experience to happen."

It seemed to me that Menasheused his artistic talent to express his deeply-rooted love for God and rejoiced in offering it as a service of love for his neighbor. His eyes shining with enthusiasm, he leaned closer to our microphone.

"The call to immortality is inscribed in the human spirit. It is inscribed in the soul of the artist when, with the work of his own talent, of his genius, he seeks to surpass the limit of the transient and of death."

POPE JOHN PAUL II
Homily at the Mass in honor of Fra Angelico
February 18, 1984

"This 'offering of love' (as it were), is ever more beautiful because it connects the baker, or the elevator man, or whoever, with the artist. This is true in the sense that if everyone of us does what he or she can do to the very best of their ability, it is serving. Therefore, in essence, we are all doing the same thing. The artist in his field, if he gives of himself completely, is no different.

"Why do we get so excited when we see someone doing their job well, even a simple thing like sweeping? We're inspired because there is love, there is the presence of God, and that to me has the same kind of power as a work of art because they're both from the same source. They're both the same kind of gift.

"I had a joyful experience recently while working on a commercial. It involved me in photographing the warmth people show to one another. I spent a great deal of time in hospitals and social service centers, watching people being cared for or caring for others. There are so many hearts that are full and being filled. The camera is just an instrument to show something about the 'Big Heart,' the main Source of it all. It's something that you cannot force or stage; you just allow it to come through. Then the beauty of a picture inspires others naturally.

"That's why I used the word channel before. You're really just there to see and acknowledge the source of all beauty by clicking the shutter and using the few crafts you've learned throughout the years." Gesturing across the room to a shelf of books on the technique of photography he continued, "I have come across many books during my career which speak of different methods of presenting a picture. They tell you what you should and shouldn't do and what equipment to buy. Many times a picture will defy all the rules and succeed beautifully. The reason for its beauty is the spirit it contains, not how it is made. It's the life force in the picture which is important. If we are in tune with this the other just falls right into place."

I was interested in having Menashe comment more on this "life force" that his pictures seemed to so consistently impart. Did it come from his own committed effort to be in tune with his subjects, sensitive to what they were feeling or experiencing?

"I try to respect my subjects," he affirmed, "acknowledge their beauty, "enter" into them. I have found that the best pictures come from trust; those I don't do aggressively by hunting down the subject, or by stealing the picture. In those pictures I allow the subject his or her freedom and they give me the permission to come.

"I remember one particular woman in Mexico who was beside a grave. She was grieving for someone. I felt that it would make a beautiful picture because of the depth of emotion in the scene. Then I became aware of the greater importance of letting her live that moment without my intrusion. I came closer to the grave site and left the camera hanging down from my neck, making it obvious that for me now, taking the picture was something secondary. I had not thought of using it, I just wanted to share this woman's sorrow. By doing so a little miracle happened: she asked me to take her picture. I didn't understand Spanish but she gestured to me that this was something that she would like. I took the picture and it was a marvelous moment freely given. These 'miracles' almost always occur when the subject is considered more important than the picture."

It was getting late. We did not want to take advantage of Menashe's generosity and gentle kindness. The two hours passed together with him and his little family had been, as his pictures are for so many, an enriching gift. □

To be continued.

1) Created by Edward Steichen for the Museum of Modern Art, Mako Mag. Corp. New York, 1955.

I live in a Mariapolis

by MICHELE ZANZUCCHI

One of the more remarkable off shoots of the Focolare Movement is the creation of a number of small cities governed by the law of mutual love. Like the "city on the mountain top" referred to in the Gospel, these cities stand as a witness to the powerful effect of the Gospel when it is lived.

Background photo: Campogiallo, one of the areas of Loppiano. Right: persons of all ages and races, united by the same ideal, live together in Loppiano.

"On entering the mini-city of Loppiano for the first time—whether you attend one of the gatherings or meet up with a group of young people walking along the road, or visit the workshops—everything appears to be such a strong contrast to your regular life, a life bruised with intollerance and aggressiveness, that you may feel that what you see and hear doesn't ring true. It may leave you suspicious." These words were written by Leandro Castellani, an Italian television director, who visited Loppiano, one of the mini-cities of the Focolare Movement.

"The words 'Love', 'to love'," he continued in his article, "have such a prominent place in the vocabulary of the town's inhabitants that it stuns you. You discover that you have to make the effort to free yourself of any preconceived ideas and return to the original meaning of those words, forgetting the meanings that have been loaded on them by the mass media. You have to make the effort to become 'small' and 'simple' like children. If you want to understand the Focolare Movement you have to first of all let go of the defensive barriers of irony and conceit."

They are the words of an observer who wants to understand, free from preconceived ideas. They cannot and do not give a comprehensive picture of all that Loppiano has to say, but they do describe the impression visitors might have when they set foot in it.

As a town, it is disconcerting; it sets you wondering; it never leaves you indifferent. On the other hand, it would be almost impossible to give the full idea of this little city on just a few pages. I could limit myself to writing this: "I invite you to spend one of your weekends here." I would add no photographs—because you might be attracted by the beauty of the landscape, and no program—so that you don't end up with just a list of activities, and no fancy publicity tactics that might lure you in.

Loppiano is a place that you understand when you visit it, or better, when you live there, even for only a few days, like one of its regular inhabitants.

"But how do the inhabitants of Loppiano live?" you may ask. "Like other people," might be the answer, but other people who want to dedicate their lives to others and not to themselves. They are men and women and children, people both young and old, married couples with families, priests and lay people of different social backgrounds and different races, united in the common desire of experiencing how true it is that the Gospel, when it is put into practice, really does fill every emptiness and transforms our everyday life into a divine adventure. ►

At work in the fields in Loppiano, the first of the permanent Mariapolises of the Focolare Movement. Its vocation—to be like the Gospel "city on the mountain top"—"a modern city with industries, schools homes, churches, a true city in miniature" wherein the inhabitants live according to the law of mutual love.

Origins of the Mariapolis

A step or two backwards in time might help us to understand the roots of this style of community life that is new and at the same time old—as old as Christianity itself. It might help us to grasp something of this collective life style that is found not only in Loppiano but also in the other little cities (seven so far) which have sprung up and will spring up on every continent in the future.

Let's take a leap from the soft rolling hills of Tuscany to the towering peaks of the Dolomite mountains, to the valley of Primiero where the members of the still-young Movement met for a summer vacation in 1949. There, from year to year, until 1959 the number of participants grew—families, men and women, priests, sisters, congressmen and laborers—and filled the nearby towns giving the impression more of a city than of a convention.

In fact, that gathering began to be called a "city" with inhabitants first of all from Italy, then from all over Europe and finally from all the continents. It was called "the city of Mary" because its purpose was to relive, in a certain way, Mary, by giving Jesus to the world, making him spiritually present there where 'two or three are united in his name.'

Years later, while speaking to a group of people in Loppiano, Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, said: *"We know that there cannot be life without a mother. Do you see the sky that covers the Mariapolis and in a certain sense envelops it? It is the symbol of a marvelous and real truth: the presence of Mary that envelops all of us.... Mary wants to nourish us and form in us her son, Christ."*

Why not a permanent Mariapolis?

As far back as 1959, during what would be the last summer Mariapolis at Fiera di Primiero, the question arose: "Why wouldn't it be possible to extend the Mariapolis to 365 days a year?" Considering the joy, the serenity and the peace it offered to those who visited it, it was a logical question. There were many problems involved, but still, the desire for a permanent Mariapolis did not vanish over the years. It was instead nurtured by the well-known Gospel passage which speaks about the "city on the mountain top, the light on the lampstand...."

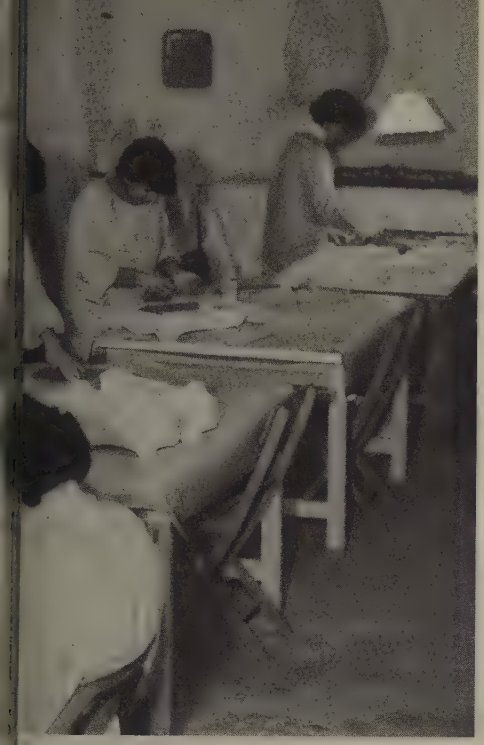
A city on the mountain top, not a utopia, not an escape from the world, not an experiment, but an honest to goodness true city.

A few years later, in 1962, Chiara and some of her first companions were on a hill overlooking the town of Einsiedeln in Switzerland, a town which grew up around the Benedictine abbey. There Chiara expressed once again the hope of building a "city on the mountain top" imbued with the spirit of the Focolare Movement. It would be a modern city with industries, schools, homes and churches, a true city in miniature, a *"city-home, where those who are tired could find rest; the disappointed, hope; the lost, the wide-open heart of a mother; sinners, purity of spirit... Whoever comes here must find love; they must find a city and citizens who bear witness to God above all with their lives."*

Duties and responsibilities

Then there are the "duties and responsibilities" of every citizen: *"In order to be admitted to the Mariapolis,"* Chiara said, *"there is a spiritual price to pay from which no one is exempted. Each person must begin right away to live the commandment of mutual love, even if they have never done it before. This is a 'must' because the Mariapolis is made up of those who live in it.... The purpose of the Mariapolis is that it be a small helping hand offered to the Church so that, helped by the oil of love, the gears of Christian society might move more smoothly."*

During a visit to Loppiano in 1980 Chiara commented further: *"All the activities, which are certainly a fruit of life, have no meaning whatsoever unless they are all based upon a common, sincere effort on the part of everyone to live mutual love, the new commandment of Jesus. If this is so,"* she added vigorously, *"then everything is meaningful. If it is not so, the Mariapolis is an absurdity....*



Above: Young people at work in the Ave Center where they produce a wide variety of items including ceramics and sculptures in terracotta and children's toys. "Work is not seen only as a means of support; it offers a way to reach self-fulfillment, to actively participate in the work of creation.

Right: "To be part of a Focolare mini city also means studying, having a sound knowledge of the truths of our faith and of the spiritual and social realities we are trying to live; it means achieving competence in our field of work."

"What God wants here above all is a blaze of love. And each one must offer himself or herself as fuel for this fire. If we do this, if we are ready to make ourselves one, all the way to being ready to give our lives out of love for the other, then we will do the will of God. And only if we do the will of God can we say that God is our ideal. Otherwise it is not so. There is no other way."

Other Mariapolises in the world

After Loppiano, which was founded in 1963, several other mini-cities were built over the years around the world, each one conforming, in the spirit of the Movement, to the particular social and religious situation of its surroundings. In Fontem, for example, in the Cameroons, a little city grew up around a hospital, in the midst of a tribe which was in danger of dying out because of disease. It aimed at creating a "new people", going beyond all the different races.

In South America there are two mini-cities: O'Higgins in Argentina and the Mariapolis Araceli near San Paolo in Brazil. Both are on their way to becoming centers for social commitment and human development. In Asia, the Mariapolis of Tagaytay in the Philippines places particular emphasis on dialogue with the other great religions, especially Buddhism. The Mariapolis in Germany, in Ottmaring, was actually born out of a mutual project of Catholics and Lutherans for the furthering of ecumenical dialogue between various Christian traditions. Montet, in Switzerland, is international, like Loppiano. Plans are underway for similar mini-cities in other countries including the United States.

Everyday life

Certainly in every little city of the Movement, every aspect of life there wants to be inspired by Christian love lived in a concrete way. Work is not seen only as a means of support; it offers a way to reach self-fulfillment, to actively participate in the work of creation. The inhabitants of the Mariapolis constantly reach out to others in need, to all people. Prayer renews each person's thrust towards God and neighbor. To be a part of a Focolare mini-city means being always alert and attentive to everything that creates a greater unity, that gives life to the family. It means creating harmony in relationships, in attitudes, thoughts, and even in the external aspects of community life, in the structures of the city itself. It means studying—having a sound knowledge of the truths of our faith and of the spiritual and social realities we are trying to live; it means achieving competence in the work we are called to do.

The inhabitants of such a city are eager to communicate with the others—sharing their experiences of putting the Gospel-based spirituality into practice, sharing ideas, news, joys and sorrows—always with the desire of reaching the fullest and deepest unity.

But, as I said before, words cannot really express what a permanent Mariapolis is like. You have to live there, at least for a while. □

WORD OF LIFE

"We have passed out of death and into life, and of this we can be sure because we love our brothers."

(1 Jn. 3:14)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

This sentence is from a letter that Saint John wrote to the members of the Christian communities he had founded. They were experiencing moments of great difficulty; heresies and false doctrines on matters of faith and morals were beginning to infiltrate the community. The pagan society that the Christians were living in was hostile towards the spirit of the Gospel.

The Apostle, who wanted to help the community of believers, points out to them the very radical solution to their problems—love of neighbor, to live the commandment of love as they had received it right from the beginning. He sees all the other commandments summed up in it.

By doing this, they would come to know what "life" means, and would be lead deeper and deeper into union with God. They would experience God-Love and, enriched by this experience, their faith would be firmer; they would be capable of facing attacks when they came and ready for moments of crisis.

"We have passed out of death and into life, and of this we can be sure because we love our brothers."

"We can be sure...". The Apostle is referring to a certainty that comes from experience. It is as if he were saying: "We have seen it, we have touched it with our own hands." It is the experience that the Christians, who had come to know the Gospel through him, made at the beginning of their conversion; that is, when they put God's commandments into practice, in particular the commandment of love of neighbor through which one enters into the very life of God.

Are Christians today aware of this experience? Certainly they know that God's commandments are meant to be put into practice. Jesus constantly insists that it is not enough just to listen to the word of God, but that we must put it into practice (Mt. 5:19), (Mt. 7:21), (Mt. 7:26).

There is something, however, that is not always fully grasped by the majority of Christians, either because they do not know it or because they have a purely theoretical knowledge of it, that is, they have not yet actually experienced it. It is that marvelous aspect of Christian life that the Apostle wants to stress here, that is, that when we live the commandment of

love, God dwells within us. An unmistakable sign of this presence is the life, the peace, the joy that he gives us a taste of already here on earth. Everything then is filled with light, everything becomes harmonious. There no longer exists a separation between faith and life. Our faith becomes that force which penetrates and links all our actions to one another.

"We have passed out of death and into life, and of this we can be sure because we love our brothers."

This word of life tells us that love of neighbor is the golden path that leads us to God. Since we are all his children, nothing is more important to him than to see that we love one another. We give him the greatest joy when we love our neighbor.

Love of neighbor brings us to union with God, and is, therefore, an inexhaustible wellspring of inner light, it is a source of life, of spiritual fruitfulness, of continual renewal. It prevents gangrene, sclerosis, or stagnation from forming in Christians. In a word, it takes us from death to life. When, instead, love is lacking, everything whithers and dies. Knowing this, we can understand why certain attitudes are so widespread in today's world: the lack of enthusiasm and of ideals; a sense of mediocrity, boredom, a longing to escape reality, the loss of values, and so on.

"We have passed out of death and into life, and of this we can be sure because we love our brothers."

The "brothers" that the Apostle is referring to in this sentence are, above all, the members of the community in which we live. If it is true that we must love everyone, it is equally true that our love must begin with those we are normally in contact with, and then reach out to all of humanity. We should think first of all of the members of our family, our co-workers, the members of our parish community, of the religious community or association to which we belong. Our love of neighbor would not be authentic and well ordered if it did not start here. Wherever we may be we are called upon to build the family of the children of God.

"We have passed out of death and into life, and of this we can be sure because we love our brothers."

This word of life opens us up to immense new perspectives. It draws us into the divine adventure of Christian love which opens up into beautiful and unforseen ways. First of all it reminds us that in a world such as ours in which violence is widespread, wherein the strongest rules, or the more astute, or where sometimes everything seems to be paralyzed by an atmosphere of materialism and selfishness, the answer is love of neighbor. This is the medicine that can cure the world of its malaise.

When we live the commandment of love not only does our own life experience a rejuvination but everything around us enjoys the consequences. It is like a wave of divine warmth which spreads and grows, penetrating our interpersonal and inter-group relationships, transforming society bit by bit.

Let's make up our minds. We all have people around us to be loved in the name of Jesus. Let us be faithful to this love and help many others to love as well. We will experience in our souls what union with God means. Faith will be revived, doubts will disappear, we will no longer know what boredom means. Life will become fuller and fuller.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

It didn't seem opportune, but...

I work at the International Guard in the aircraft maintenance section. Due to the very nature of the job it is difficult to talk to other co-workers about anything that doesn't directly concern work. In addition to this, some of the employees in the section tend to be very demonstrative and verbose. One person in particular has a reputation for being argumentative and short tempered. When we arrived in the morning we could immediately tell by his face whether he was in a good or bad mood. If he was in a bad mood we just kept away from him. If he was in a good mood then everything was okay.

One morning we walked in and this person was obviously in a bad mood. The negative comments soon started. "Keep away from him. He's having a bad day already," someone said. (It was only 6:15 a.m.) I watched him walk across the room and go into his office. In that moment the word of life came to my mind: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). I thought that perhaps I could take that extra step to find out what was bothering him. I decided to take the risk.

I walked into his office and asked, "How are you this morning?" His reply was inaudible. I tried again, "Is everything alright?" He sat back in his chair and looked up at me. "No, not really." So I sat down. He began to tell me about his mother who was dying and what a great suffering this was for him because he was very close to her. He began telling me about other problems that he was experiencing in his life. The whole time I just listened to him. After about an hour I left his office to go back to my job, but I told him that I would be glad to continue the conversation at lunchtime.

During all this time my co-workers were wondering what was going on. I had been sitting there in that man's office at a time that didn't seem opportune to even be around him. As I walked out of his office I could feel everyone's eyes on me.

At lunchtime we continued our conversation, and at the end of the day he looked at me and said, "You know, I really appreciate your sitting down with me. Thank you." I didn't say anything. All I had done was listen.

Since then we have become friends. He comes to talk with me often and recently told me that now, after several years, he wanted to become "re-acquainted" with God. He has changed a lot and has begun to talk to some of the other workers too. Maintaining this relationship with him has helped him to work out a number of other serious problems that have recently come up in his life. There's much more harmony now where I work and there seems to be a chain of love being built.

B.B.

A new approach

I am the manager of an insurance claims office. One day a woman phoned in very upset because we had declined authority to pay for her husband's surgery. I tried to explain our company's position but I could tell that she didn't understand. I was about to bring the conversation to a close when I remembered something I had once heard: "At the end of our life, God will not ask us if we did our job perfectly, but rather if we loved."

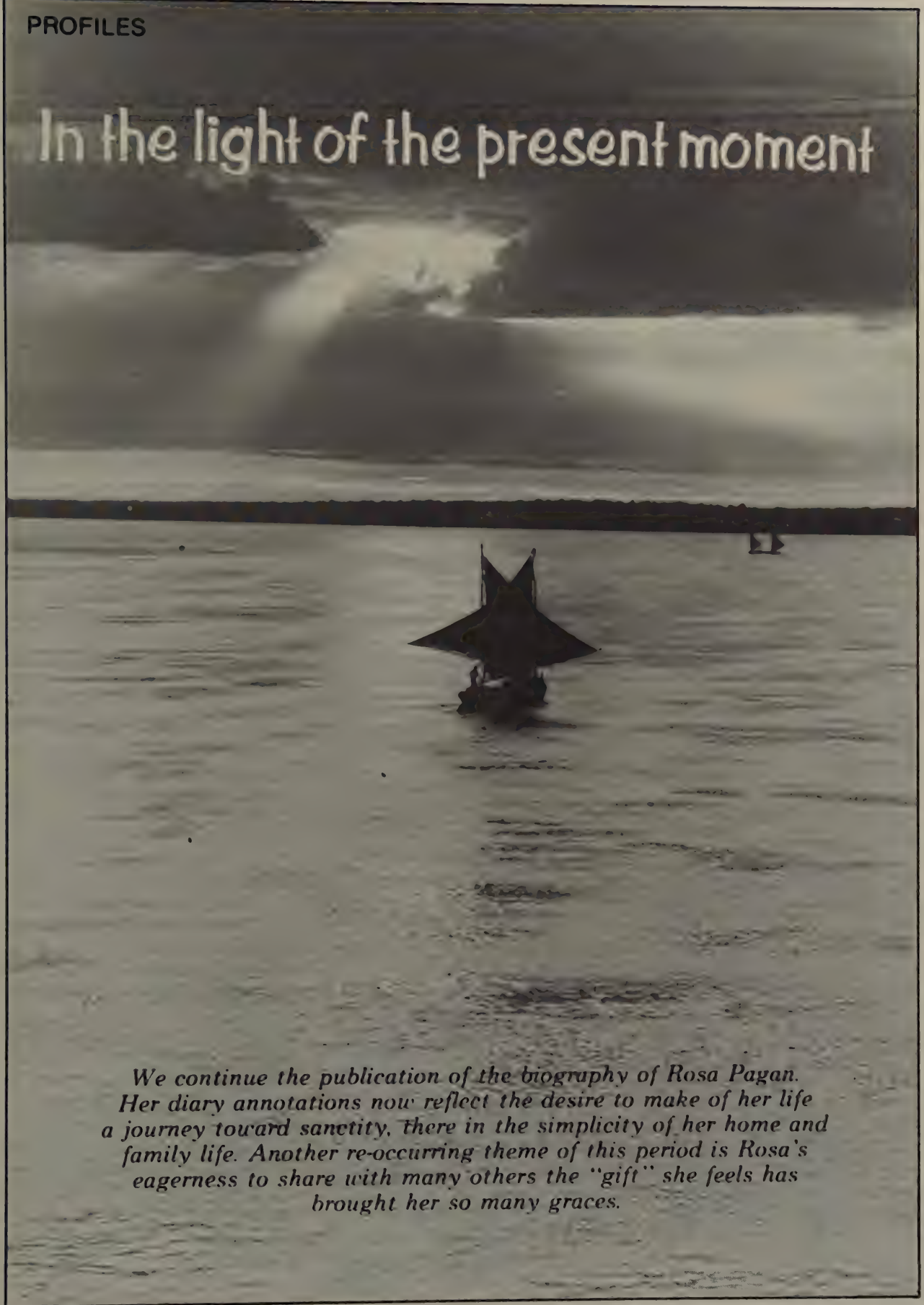
I knew I could not change our company's position in that moment but I could love this person by trying to speed up the decision-making process. I promised I would get another doctor to the hospital as soon as possible for the second opinion our company needed. It was already late in the afternoon and I thought of waiting until the next morning, but in the back of my mind I knew I had not yet done enough.

I tried to contact our staff nurse but with no results. We worked out a plan to call her at home that evening and ask her to make the arrangements. By 8 o'clock the next morning our nurse had contacted the doctor and by ten o'clock he had called with his results. We immediately authorized payment of surgery.

The patient's wife didn't know how to thank us and she apologized for her previous impatience. My co-workers liked this new approach to providing services for our claimants without the usual hard-line attitude. But most of all, I experienced an inner joy and peace knowing that I loved.

L.L.

In the light of the present moment



We continue the publication of the biography of Rosa Pagan. Her diary annotations now reflect the desire to make of her life a journey toward sanctity, there in the simplicity of her home and family life. Another re-occurring theme of this period is Rosa's eagerness to share with many others the "gift" she feels has brought her so many graces.

United Nations

A complete donation

Time and again Rosa mentioned in her diary her deep desire to become a saint. *"A few years ago,"* she wrote, *"I began to understand the Christ of the Passion. Those were moments when my faith was caught up in a struggle between the things of the spirit and those of this world.*

"He taught me to meditate on his passion and in it I found the strength of grace and my total 'conversion' began. I say 'conversion' because although I was born and grew up in the heart of the Catholic faith, I was never a true Christian. Many times the Lord knocked at my door, but I only answered him halfway. The world attracted me very strongly.

"Through various circumstances, unusual ones, the Lord asked me to give myself completely to him. I am not going to mention all of these circumstances here, but I should speak of two of them, the last ones, because they are the most precious. One is my encounter with the Focolare Movement, and the other is this dreaded illness and its consequences...."

The journey to sanctity

Later in the month she noted what the journey to sanctity involved, practically speaking, in her situation: *"It is here, at my home, with my children, that I must be holy. How difficult it is!"*

As the end of January neared, Rosa was frequently in pain. In the beginning of February she also experienced hemorrhaging on several occasions. Whenever this happened, she had to postpone her chemotherapy treatments because she was unable to travel to the hospital.

"My small physical sufferings," she wrote on one of these occasions, *"I offer them to you with the same love with which I offer my joys and hopes. I ask you to give me health if it is your will. But if your plans are different, give me the grace and strength to embrace them."*

Every day that she was well enough, Rosa took a bus to her parish church to attend Mass at noon. This was the "high point" of her day. *"Daily Mass is my source of energy and life,"* she noted in March.

"I suffer when I can't go to Mass," she wrote another day, when she had been too ill to travel to church. *"I love your Mass, my Mass. I offer you today's loss and unite myself, small as I am, to all the Masses being said throughout the world...."*

Later she recalled: *"On Thursday I missed Mass, the most important moment of my day. I lived that day without really living it. I thought and thought ... but thoughts are worth nothing if they don't become actions. And so, while I was straightening up the kitchen after dinner, I made a decision —I had to go to church! First one bus, then another.... At eight in the evening I entered the church. I began to speak with Jesus, but felt strongly that that wasn't enough because I wanted him to be truly present in my heart. So a bit timidly I went to knock on the rectory door. I explained my situation to the priest and I was able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. What a sublime joy!"*

On February 17 Rosa turned 49. *"This is the first day of my fiftieth year,"* she wrote that night, *"and just by chance, I am beginning the second half of my notebook. It is divided from the first part by a green page. Green, the color of hope. It marks the start of a new step in my life. What step will it be? Only you know, Lord, how much I want to live for you, for you alone. Only in this way I can be of use to the world.*

"I don't know what the future holds for me," she told Jesus. *"Crosses will come but you know that I love them. If I hadn't had them, wretched as I am, I would be even less than what I am today.*

"You know that in the happiness of my self-giving, there is also sorrow, the sorrow that comes from being unworthy of you and having wasted the best years of my life. But you know what went on. You permitted it to happen. I believe this, and I recognize the value of what you give me, the worth of what I am today. Thank you, thank you."

Doing the everyday tasks

On most days, Rosa's illness didn't prevent her from performing the everyday tasks common to all mothers and homemakers. She cleaned, cooked, did the laundry, saw to it that the boys completed their homework, and so on. To do everything with love was, of course, harder at some times than at others. She wrote one evening: *"Last night, after a peaceful day in which I did various jobs like vacuuming the hallway and tidying up the house, I became irritated with the boys. It was one of those outbursts that happens when there is no peace and love among us. At times, when those things happen, I don't know what's best to do. So I didn't say much. I just*

"My work is contemplation, offering and prayer. My task is to be a little candle always aflame with the love of God."

tried to rebuild the peace among us and continued to pray silently within my heart. In a moment or two the whole things blew over and there was peace once more."

Spring came, and the warm clear days brought with them a worsening of Rosa's condition. In spite of this, she never lamented the fact that she was in so much pain. On the contrary, she wrote, *"It would be impossible to express the abundance of graces that this illness has brought into my life."*

Carrier of fire

Rosa always offered her suffering for a special intention which ususally varied from day to day depending on circumstances. In March the intention which she recorded repeatedly was for her sons and all the youth of the world. Although her children were always uppermost in her mind, she was vividly aware of her membership in a larger "family," and she longed for the day when she would be well enough to pursue an "active" apostolate.

"I can see clearly that I must be the one to begin following a way of perfection; but I know that I have to bring my children with me too. For now, my family is the little world in which God wants me to live," she wrote. *"If it is his will, then with his grace the day may come when it will be his will on a larger scale. But what am I saying? It may well be that death will cut off this new branch long before I expect it!"*

On a Sunday in April, Rosa traveled to Paterson to attend the Baptism of her young godchild Margherita. During the ceremony an idea came to her, and immediately she transformed it into a prayer: *"I've wasted the years of my youth,"* she told God. *"Let the plan which you were unable to fulfill in me be fulfilled through this child,"*

"I'm sure that he had a plan for me which I've ruined," she mused afterwards, *"but how great his mercy is. Already on in years, I'm consecrated to him. Jesus, let it be so forever, until death, and even beyond—for all eternity ... It seems incredible; I have three sons and yet I'm consecrated to God."*

True to her vocation as a focolarina[1], as a "carrier of fire," Rosa's heart burned with a desire to share her experience of the love of God. She felt that her encounter and understanding of the spirituality of the Focolare Movement had brought her many graces and she wanted to share this life with others, especially those around her in Princeton. Towards the end of April she wrote in her diary: *"Every morning I entrust the community of Princeton to Jesus in the Eucharist. I entrust it to his heart, and pray that he will prepare it. My task now is to offer everything for his glory."*

The right moment will come

On one of the mornings when Rosa was too ill to go to church, a priest brought her Communion. Afterwards, thinking how much she would have liked to tell him about the Movement, Rosa concluded, *"The right moment will come. For now, I'll pray and offer each little thing I do so that the Movement may take root and flourish and bear fruits here in Princeton."*

Although she sometimes longed to do "bigger things" as well, Rosa recognized the great importance of her role as a mother. When I meditate I often think about the house of Nazareth; about Jesus and Mary who lived like us; about Joseph, the humble protector of his family. In him, I see my ►

role as a protector of my children," she wrote.

And on another occasion she commented, *"My conscience makes me question many things, especially with regard to my sons. What do they watch on television? How do they behave in this or that situation? I can only pray, not with my lips, but rather with my heart: God have pity on me, on my children, on their two girlfriends, on their friends...."*

It was hard for Rose to stay at home, seeing only her family and close friends, when it seemed that the whole world outside was just waiting for the gift she felt she had received. *"Throughout the day, it occurred to me several times that I don't do enough,"* she wrote one evening. *"Perhaps this thought comes to me because of my inactivity. God knows how much I would like to live out my faith and give it to others in an active way. But I must believe that God has other plans for me. He's the one who sent me this illness with its long periods of recuperation. My work now is contemplation, offering and prayer. My task is to be a little candle always aflame with the love of God."*

May 17 was a red-letter day for Rosa. A small Focolare meeting was held in Princeton and many of her friends and acquaintances attended.

"Princeton's time has arrived!" she wrote that night. *"It has been a beautiful day, a day filled with joy."*

That same week, one of her friends who had been present at the meeting called to say that she was truly fascinated with what she had heard about the spirituality of the Movement. *"Lord,"* Rosa prayed afterwards, *"make her an instrument of yours."*

Peace, peace

There were peace demonstrations in cities across the nation that spring and Princeton was no exception. *"Peace, peace! It's a unanimous cry. But what a way for it to be heard!"* Rosa commented after seeing one of the marches. *"As if peace could be obtained through violence and demonstrations. They do nothing to shed light on spiritual values."*

The situation made Rosa suffer deeply and she wanted to do something about it. With an idea in mind, she called the Focolare hoping that with the light that comes from Jesus in the midst[2] she could see how to proceed. Instead she realized while talking her plan over with another focolarina that, because of her poor health, it was actually best that she do nothing.

"This decision brought me peace," Rosa remarked later, *"but it was peace in the midst of desolation, peace in the midst of death. I've learned something. I must lose everything. I felt very strongly that I should* do *something, but I do not act alone. I believe in unity, and so I said good-bye to my fervent desire. Now I see very clearly that doing nothing is God's will for me in this situation."*

For some time after that, however, Rosa offered her days *"for peace in the world, peace in every heart, in every family, in schools, in all communities, in every action."*

Our pilgrimage ahead

From the various reflections written by Rosa in the first months of 1970, we also read: *"How sad it is for one to live immersed in the illusions of this world! They blind us to the spiritual order of things, and envelop everything around us in a false 'reality'. When we learn to detach ourselves from everything we can finally see things as they really are. With the grace of God, our spirit can penetrate the divine essence of every person, of all things, always in the context of each one's uniqueness. And life becomes a melody. The journey is full of light. Our pilgrimage ahead, moment by moment, becomes a living reality.*

"Often we need to detach ourselves from people and things which we have embraced with an almost religious fervor, and to do this, we must die to ourselves. In the depth of our being there is the Absolute. We must detach ourselves forever from those people and things that do not bring us to it. Our soul cannot be satisfied otherwise, because it had been created for infinite heights. There is only one means to accomplish this: Jesus Crucified. We must embrace him, be crucified with him, and in him find a new life."

At the end of May, Rosa repeated in her diary these words of Chiara Lubich: *"We cannot be present at the crucifixion of Jesus as mere spectators, nor as persons who come to beg favors. We must be present as persons who also drink of the chalice for the good of humanity: other Marys."*[3]

"How much I would like to drink from his chalice, and how inadequate I feel," Rosa commented.

Towards the beginning of June, Rosa began hemorrhaging ►

MARIAPOLIS 1985

DON'T MISS IT!

The Mariapolis gatherings are the summer meetings of the Focolare, held every year, for those who wish to come into contact with it.

For one week the Mariapolis offers to hundreds of people of all ages and walks of life a very full program that includes general sessions with talks on the spirituality of unity, sharing of experiences in living this spirituality, documentaries, meetings in small sharing groups and recreational programs. The Mariapolis is a time for prayer and recollection. The celebration of the Eucharist is at the center of each day and all participants gather together at the conclusion of the activities for evening prayer.

Children have separate activities which involve them in the life of the Mariapolis through various spiritual and recreational programs. Special programs are available for teenagers as well.

The week, however, is more than the sum of its parts. It is an experience of how life, also every day life, can be transformed if love and unity are its foundation. When the Mariapolis ends, people find that it was not only a tremendously enjoyable week, but they have experienced a way of living that they will be able to bring back home.

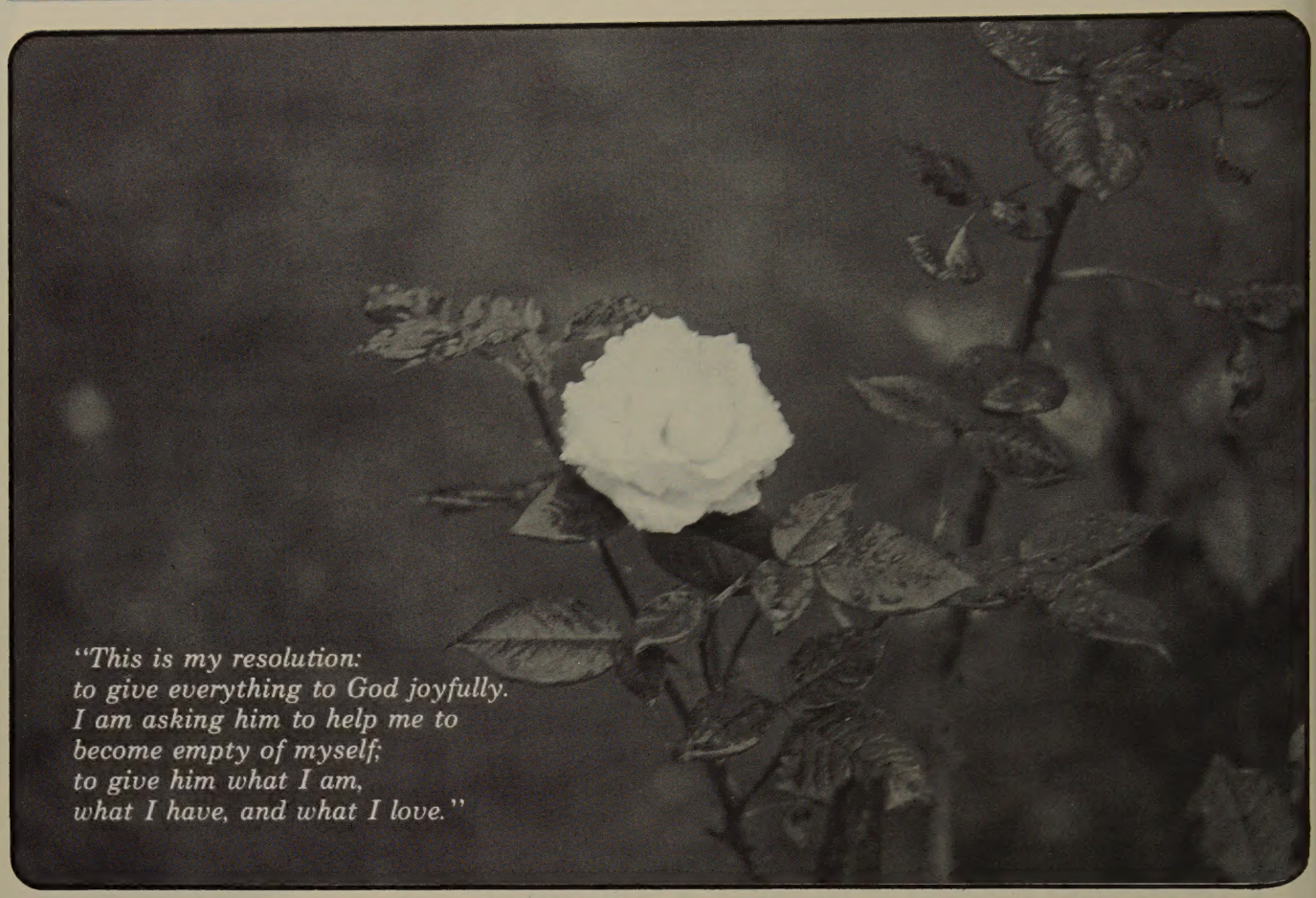
SOUTHWEST:
Las Cruces State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico
June 30 - July 6

NORTHWEST:
Notre Dame University
Nelson, British Columbia
July 7 - July 13

MIDWEST/EAST COAST:
Alfred University,
Alfred, New York
August 4 - August 10

CARIBBEAN: **In Spanish only**
Centro Vacacional Olimpico
Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic
July 24 - July 28

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT THE FOCOLARE CENTER NEAREST YOU.
(See inside back cover for addresses)


"This is my resolution:
to give everything to God joyfully.
I am asking him to help me to
become empty of myself;
to give him what I am,
what I have, and what I love."

again, and in those periods of intense sickness her thoughts turned to the inevitable outcome of her illness: *"I've paused for a moment at the thought of my last moment here on earth, when I will be at the threshold of eternity. I asked Mary to take me under her mantle when that day comes, and to cover my nothingness with the veil of her purity so that I will be ready when he comes to take me.*

"There is so much to do, so much! And yet, 'Time is fast escaping me',"[4] she wrote a few days later. *"Jesus, teach me to walk in your will always, so that I may see clearly what you want from me in each present moment. Let all that has not been done for your glory vanish. Is there some little thing you want me to do? Tell me so clearly. Is there some big thing you want me to do? I am small and incompetent, but you yourself, not I, do the big things you ask of me. Give me the understanding and prudence to serve you as you want to be served. Yes, there is so much to do, but I can't live as if life is a race that must be won at any cost. I* must *win, yes, but only for the glory of God. He is the master of this game....*

"This is my resolution: to give everything to God joyfully. I am asking him to help me to become empty of myself; to give him what I am, what I have, and what I love."

All that Rosa "gave" to God was offered for someone or, as in the case below, for many people, for all.

"I read in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 'It is you I want, not your possessions. Children are not expected to save up for their parents, but parents for children.'[5] *St. Paul considered himself the father of the Corinthians and as such he had to save up for them.*

"This message is for me too. As a 'little Mary', notwithstanding my nothingness, I must 'save up' for my children, offering my life and my small actions for all these souls—those of my children, my own, those whom God has let me meet, and even those I don't know."

In the last week of June, Rosa began to teach a course in summer school; for the first time in over a year she was able to pursue the profession which gave her such a sense of fulfillment.

"I'm thankful that I can do this and hope that God will give me the health I'll need," she noted soon after starting. *"I only want to do his will. I offer this to him through Mary so that she might purify my every action. May she be my way to him in my pilgrimage towards eternity."* □

To be continued.

1) See inside back cover; 2) Cf. Mt. 18:20; 3) Stirrings of Unity *by Chiara Lubich, New City Press, New York 1964 p.75; 4)* Meditations *by Chiara Lubich, New City Press, New York 1974 p.58; 5) 2 Cor. 12:14.*

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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